Something that seems to be a byproduct of the scientific revolution is the fact that we have gotten very un-curious. That is when a chain of atomic interactions are supposed to explain everything, there is little room left to pose really interesting questions. For example, all scientific worldview can tell us about reacting to something like beauty is that it has something to do with us passing on our genes. So excuse me while I nod off. We have tried to shoehorn exciting and mysterious ideas into pedestrian explanations. We have grown so in love with our theories that we have ceased asking whether they are doing a very good job of explaining anything. In my mind the explanation of something in materialistic terms often makes it less of what it is. Anyone who has ever had to explain a joke knows what I am talking about because in the explaining of the joke you have probably noticed that you sort of destroy what was funny about the joke. And I think something similar can happen on this Sunday of Pentecost where we hear, “When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” Certainly we can describe what happens. The spirit comes and people who could not speak certain languages could suddenly speak those languages. But that is not the interesting part; it’s more of a fun party game. Now please don’t think that I am discounting this part. It was obviously very important to help spread the Gospel to all nations, but I think the interesting part and the part that speaks to us on Pentecost is how does this mixture of the Holy Spirit and us work? How can we have something come into us and change us in the way it did for those first apostles? And not just change us but also bring something to us that was not a part of us before? It is really a question of how do we interact with God and further how are we made aware that we are interacting with God?

Today it is quite obvious, with the whole speaking in other tongues business, but most times it is not, and I think for many of us beginning to understand how to hear and interact with God will take some re-learning. For we live in a world that either drowns out or refuses to acknowledge that God exists at all. In such a world it is going to require us to stand athwart understandings that are materialistic in nature. Think about it like this. Let’s say I asked you why you liked a particular work of art. You might say you enjoyed the artists brush strokes or use of color, but ultimately there would be something that you could not quite explain. There would be something that just is. It is that feeling of “just is” that we need to cultivate to have such interactions with God. The more we look at art the more we will see in that art and the more we spend time with God the more of God we will see. The Psalmist tells us to be still and know that I am God. The more we are still and in the presence of God the more we will know of God. If we try to explain it we will capture some of it, but not what theologian Paul Tillich called the ground of being itself. It is there and we know about it but explaining it becomes like explaining a joke, it becomes less of what it is in the explanation. And because of the electronic babysitters with which we surround ourselves our ability to hear and see what God is doing becomes more and more difficult. People may hear from God but assign it something else, because the distraction immediately engulfs their attention, like a dog seeing a squirrel. Pentecost seems dramatic and it is, but what we forget is the hours of quiet, prayer and time spent with Jesus that happened before any of this. They were in a state to hear from God because they were attuned to God. Most of us these days are impatient and if we aren’t speaking a language we did not previously know within a few moments we conclude that God either does not exist or is not speaking to us. We expect God to provide the sort of immediate gratification that our materialist world tells us are the only things. We are rich physically but poor spiritually. We have forgotten to ask the interesting questions and then say God does not exist. Instead on this day when the Holy Spirit came we need to focus on that sort of knowledge, the sort of knowledge that cannot always be explained or put into materialistic terms so that we may be God’s both now and forevermore.